

THE PA, N43/59, AT PAWHETAU POINT, KAWAKAWA BAY, CLEVEDON, SOUTH AUCKLAND

AILEEN FOX

AUCKLAND INSTITUTE AND MUSEUM

Abstract. A large and imposing headland pa defended by three transverse ditches is described and its economic resources are discussed. After examination of the archaeological and historical evidence, the site is tentatively identified as the residence of Te Haupa, chief of the Ngati-Paoa in the early nineteenth century.

This large and well defended pa is situated on the headland on the west side of Kawakawa Bay known as Pawhetau Point. It was the first site that I saw for myself soon after my arrival in Auckland in February 1973, and at that time it typified the similarities and the differences between the promontory forts and cliff castles of the Iron Age, with which I was familiar in Britain, and the Maori fortifications I had come to New Zealand to study. Since it was a complex site, a full-scale survey was needed, which was carried out under the direction of Karel Peters.

SITUATION (Figs. 1, 2)

Kawakawa Bay is situated where the land on the west side of the Firth of Thames is broken by the narrow channels between Ponui, Pakihi, and Karamuramu Islands, giving access to the Tamaki strait and the mouth of the Wairoa river. To the north, the island group is continued by the larger land mass of Waiheke Island, so that viewed from the distant Coromandel, or from the water as first seen by Cook, it looks like a continuous coast. The area, then, topographically is part of the Thames region, though its present-day links are with Clevedon and Papakura inland. The coast was known in the early nineteenth century as Ware-Kawa (Wright 1950, p. 158).

The wide bay, over 2 km across, is shallow, with extensive muddy sand exposed at low tide, and is surrounded by a ring of steep-sided hills (Figs. 1, 2). The fortified headland is at the northern end of a 60 m ridge that extends from this ring and which, together with the adjoining Waitawa headland, forms the watershed between the small streams that drain into the bay and those which flow to the Wairoa estuary. The site commands a wide view north-east across the bay to the Hauraki Gulf and to the distant heights of the Coromandel. Geologically, the underlying formation consists of indurated sedimentary rocks of Mesozoic origin, turbidites, finely bedded sandstones and siltstones belonging to the Waiheke group (Eastern Facies). These rocks are exposed at the Point and on the adjoining beach. The soil elsewhere on the promontory is a yellowish clay, technically a leached northern yellow-brown earth, as described by the Soil Survey, and now is regarded as of low fertility (Gibbs *et al.* 1968, p. 62, N.Z. Soil Bureau 1973).

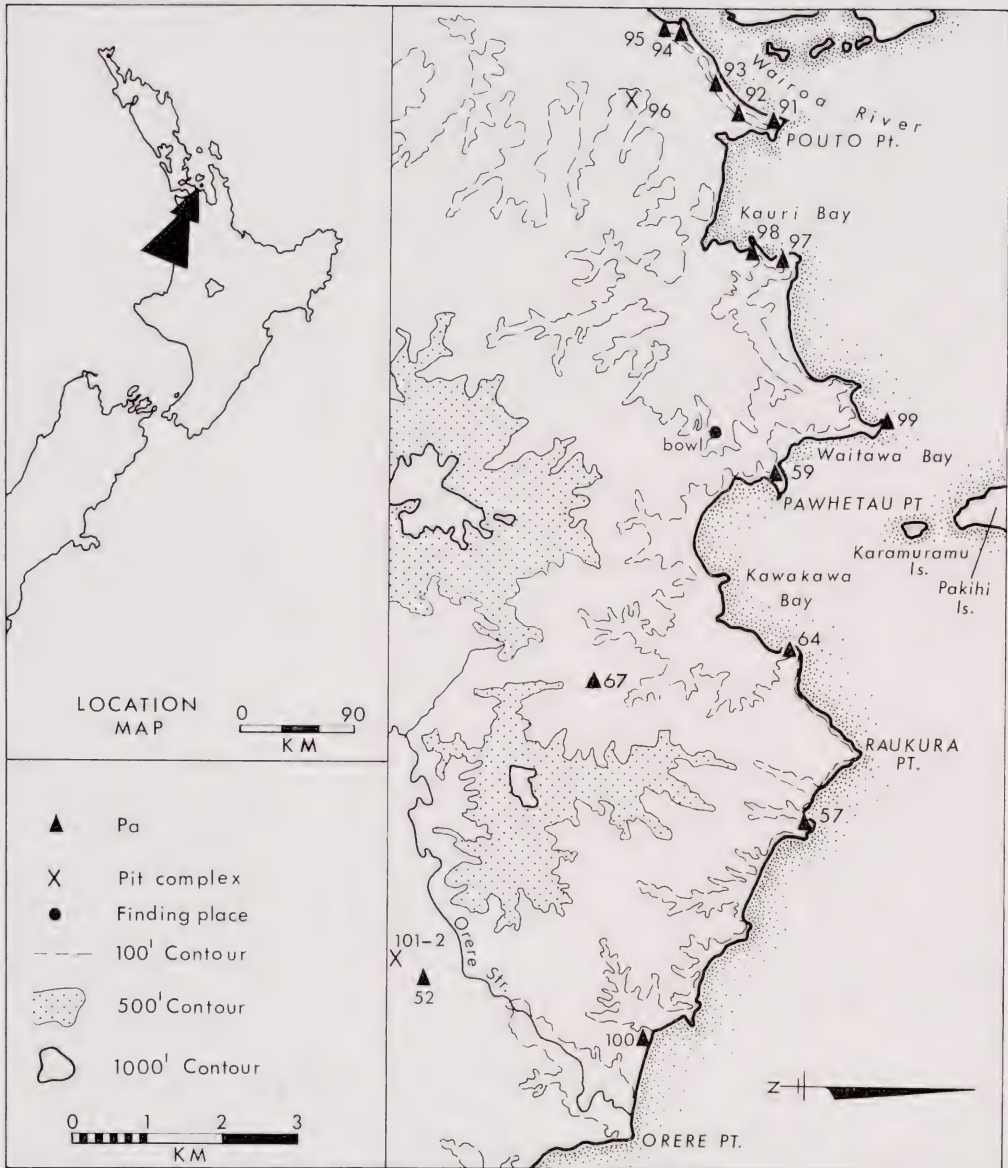


Fig. 1. Location map and distribution of pa and other sites in the vicinity of Kawakawa Bay.

SITE DESCRIPTION (Fig. 4)

THE DEFENCES

The headland is naturally well defended by steep slopes on either side to the sea and by a lateral valley with a stream on the south-east. The only line of easy approach is from the south along the narrow level top of the spur, which was barred by three transverse ditches and associated banks, spaced at intervals of 18 and 60 m (Fig. 3). In addition, there is a short length (20 m) of ditch with an external bank dug diagonally

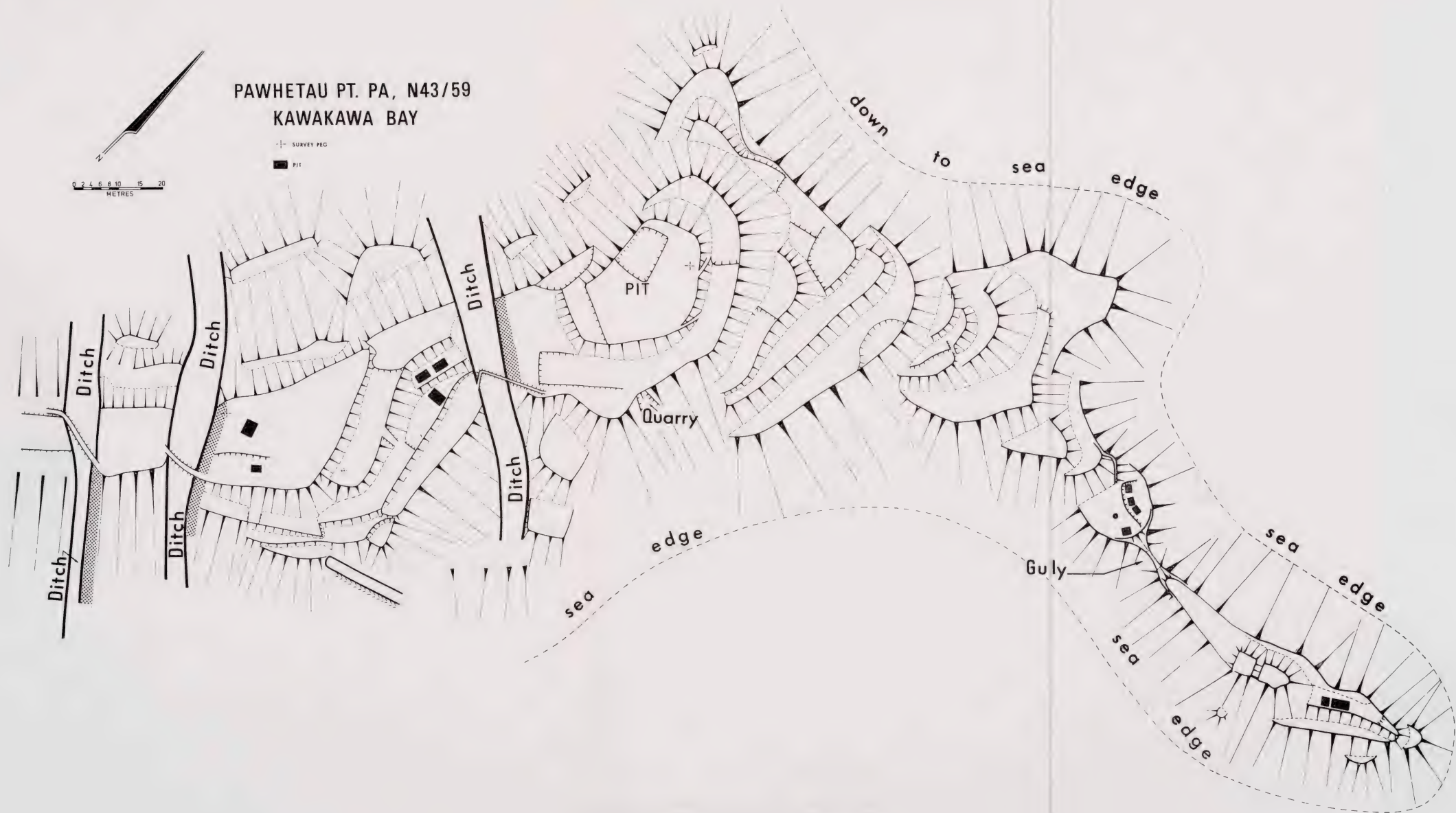


Fig. 4. Plan of Pawhetau Point pa (N43/59), Kawakawa Bay.



Fig. 2. Aerial view of Pawhetau Point pa with Kawakawa Bay in background.
(Photo, White's Aviation).

on the south-east hill slope, presumably to cover a possible lateral approach up from the Kawakawa shore or from the side of the valley. The three ditches measure 7.6, 6.8 and 11.7 m wide respectively, and from 2 to *ca.* 3.5 m deep; they were dug for some 30 m down the slope on either side of the ridge. The banks are small in comparison with the ditches, measuring about 3 m wide and one metre high; it is clear that part of the ditch soil went to make a flattened surface on the ridge instead of heightening the banks. The outermost ditch has no internal bank across the ridge top, although this is present on the slope (Fig. 4). Instead, the soil was used to build up an external platform 8 x 12 m and about 0.5 m high, which screened the entrance and may have carried a fighting stage. This would ensure visual control over a dip in the ridge on the line of approach.

The banks are not of sufficient bulk to act as a defensive rampart; their function was to increase the height and lengthen the scarp of the ditch, making it more difficult to cross, and to protect the base of the palisade, of which the main timber uprights would have been deeply bedded in the subsoil, as Bellwood (1971, pp. 68-69) demonstrated at Otakanini pa, South Kaipara. The entrance through the defences is at the south-east edge of the ridge; in each case it was by a narrow path on a ledge about 0.5 m wide, crossing the ditches diagonally and leading to a small gap in the rampart.



Fig. 3. Ground view of Pawhetau Point pa looking north-east from Kawakawa Bay.
(Photo, W. Bourke).

There was a line of weakness at the south-west end of the third ditch where the slopes ease, and there is a small re-entrant valley, which made an attack from the shore of Kawakawa Bay feasible at this point. To cover this, two terraced "flats", 6 x 8 m and 10 x 8 m, were constructed on the main defensive scarp, abutting on the ditch and flanking the probable line of attack. It is clear that these are secondary constructions, since the soil to make them has been quarried from farther along the defensive scarp (see quarry on Fig. 4); they may have carried fighting stages. The remainder of the pa will have been fortified by palisades: a thick line on the plan (Fig. 4) indicates the likely position for the principal defence at the crest of the major scarps; this was probably supplemented by others lower down on the seaward slope.

THE INTERIOR

The pa is divided into three zones by the ditches. The first zone is flat and was apparently unoccupied, probably being kept clear for defence and for the reception of visiting chiefs and their followers. The second zone also has a level area on the ridge summit though two pits and shell midden indicate occupation. A lower area adjoining the third ditch and continuing along the south-east slopes is divided by scarps into 7 or 8 terraces and platforms on which there is a group of three rectangular storage pits. It is possible that there was a subsidiary entrance on this side of the pa, screened by the diagonal ditch and bank previously mentioned (p. 16). The third zone occupied the highest part of the ridge (60 m, 198 feet), with a perimeter defined by formidable scarps up to 7 m long. It consists of a flat area behind the rampart, again for defence, a sickle-shaped lower terrace, and an irregular-shaped summit platform or *tihi*, linked to the terrace by diagonal paths across the dividing scarp. At the end of the terrace, overlooking the sea, there is a house site defined by low banks, measuring 6.2 x 4.3 m. On the summit there is a large oblong pit, 12 x 8 m and 0.75 m deep, probably a

roofed kumara store (Fox 1974). In effect, this zone forms a citadel for the pa, in which the chief's dwelling would be located, probably on the highest point.

Beyond this, the spur changes direction to an east to west alignment, and narrowing, falls steadily and steeply to about 15 m above sea level, where it is interrupted by an erosion gully which provides an easy way down to the beach. The whole descent has been elaborately terraced and subdivided for occupation and at the lower levels scarped for defence. On the lowest terrace there are four small rectangular and one circular storage pits: the contents, probably kumara, would have been brought to the site most easily by sea.

The occupied area did not end at the gully, for although its sides have been extensively steepened for defence, a narrow causeway was left, crossing to the rocky Pawhetau Point. The crest of the promontory (30 m) which is practically an island, has been levelled to make a square platform, which affords a good look-out over the bay, and there is terracing, two pits, and deposits of shell midden at the end of the point.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The pa on Pawhetau Point was obviously a site of major importance in the lower Thames region. It would be a formidable place to attack, whether along the ridge where there were three successive earthworks to cross, or from the sea up the very steep terraced slopes, presumably defended with palisades. The whole site is over one kilometre long. It contains some 40 terraces in addition to the *tahi* on the summit of the third enclosure, and if it be accepted that each of these housed a family, or in the case of the larger examples an extended family group, the pa could accommodate between 300 and 500 adults. Such a population is commensurate with the effort involved in building the triple earthworks and the palisades. It is evident from the extensive terracing on the seaward side of the headland, extending even on to Pawhetau Point, as well as on the steep slopes facing Waitawa Bay, that the population was expanding during the occupation and there was need to create level ground for housing, even if it were outside the main defences. In times of stress the inhabitants could retreat behind the fortifications. The same phenomenon was noticed by Captain Cook at the pa he described in Mercury Bay (Reed & Reed 1969, p. 62).

The economic advantages of the site are its easy access to seafoods, fish from the open water and shellfish from the beaches. There is a good landing place for canoes on the beach facing Karamuramu Island, on the north side of the point. F. W. Shawcross (1967, p. 107) has shown by his study of the midden at Galatea Bay on the nearby Ponui Island that the principal catch was snapper, taken in the summer season probably by net, of which a proportion were gutted and dried. Shells in the midden deposits which are exposed in many parts of Pawhetau pa are mostly pipi and cockles, with some scallops, gastropods, and the occasional oyster. Fernroot presumably was the staple carbohydrate. Judging by the few storage pits visible, kumara played a secondary role in the food supply, though it is significant that a large pit is situated on the *tahi*, which probably contained the chief's personal store. Birds could be taken and berries gathered in the bush on the hills a short distance inland. Water was available from the stream in the valley about 100 m downhill.

The distribution of recorded settlement sites based on a rapid field survey (Fig. 1, Appendix 1) shows that the nearby coastal district was thickly populated, with a major concentration on the ridge flanking the Wairoa estuary, formerly islanded by swamp, though not all sites are likely to have been occupied at any one time. In comparison with Pawhetau Point, these are all small pa, defended by short lengths of transverse ditch, and are likely to have held some 40-80 people. Only the pa on Pouto Point, which has two lines of ditches and banks 30 m apart, is built to a somewhat analogous design. Field survey, therefore, enables us to recognise the Pawhetau Point pa as a major tribal centre, a *hapu* pa, and to seek for an historical context.

As is well known, the tribe occupying the west side of Thames in the early nineteenth century was the Ngati-Paoa. Their headquarters, when visited by the missionary Henry Williams in the 1830s, was at Whakatiwai, near Kaiaua (New Brighton). Earlier, however, the area was visited by Samuel Marsden and J. L. Nicholas, in the brig *Active*, from the Bay of Islands in January 1815, who have both left accounts of the visit. After passing Point Rodney and Cape Colville, which Marsden, like Cook, called the heads of Thames, early next morning found them "pretty far up the harbour in which there were several islands both on the east and west side.", which should refer to the Waiheke-Ponui and Whanganui groups. "About eleven o'clock we came opposite the residence of the head chief [*ariki*] Houpa [Te Haupa], . . . a man much esteemed as well as feared and possessed very great power." (Elder 1932, p. 103). Nicholas, who calls him Shoupa, states that his authority reached from Thames to Bream Bay (Nicholas 1817, 1, p. 393). The chief came out in a canoe, came on board and invited them to anchor and to visit his residence nearby. Marsden (Elder 1932, p. 104), however, preferred to press on with a favourable wind noting "We then made sail for the mouth of the river [Thames]. We were then on the west side of the harbour, about four leagues from its mouth.", thus establishing that Te Haupa's residence was situated beyond the islands, but not within the firth or river mouth. Later, after a stormy passage, they landed at a village on the west bank, and from there visited another of Te Haupa's fortified settlements a mile away, inhabited only by one of Te Haupa's wives, the men being away at war (Nicholas 1817, 1, p. 399). On the return journey, adverse winds unfortunately prevented Marsden visiting Te Haupa's residence as he had promised, for which he expressed regret (Elder 1932, p. 108). Such topographical details as Marsden provides are compatible with the situation of Pawhetau Pa and its commanding view over the Hauraki Gulf and the route of the *Active*, and though the identification cannot be pressed, since it is based on the assumption that a notable earthwork can be equated with a notable man, the possibility that this pa was once a residence of Te Haupa should be kept in mind.

The prehistory of the site and its archaeological development could only be ascertained by extensive excavation. A casual find of human bones by two schoolboys a few years ago on one of the seaward terraces was dated by its collagen contents to about A.D. 1600, by the Institute of Nuclear Sciences (R2548 350±80 B.P.), and suggests that the site had a long prehistoric occupation. Another indication is the large zoomorphic wooden bowl with a spout acquired by the Auckland Museum (No. 44626) and illustrated by Simmons (1973, p. 63, Fig. 12). This was found concealed in a swamp on the west side of the ridge less than a mile away from the pa. Simmons (1973, p. 61) has emphasised that the fine carving is typical of the

Hauraki (Thames) style and is perhaps of 17th century date. The attribution is consistent with Ngati-Paoa ownership.

The occupation of Pawhetau pa must have come to an end at latest during the Ngapuhi attacks of the 1820s. Te Haupa had died in an epidemic soon after Marsden's visit, which, according to D'Urville (Wright 1950, p. 158), had led his descendants to move farther north along the Hauraki gulf. In 1833, when Henry Williams was at the mouth of the Wairoa, the district was deserted: "The rocks were covered with oysters and *pipis* on the mud banks . . . and the sea full of fish of all kinds. It was melancholy to look around . . . no bustle of civil life. No vessels, boats or canoes moving . . . over the surface of these waters . . . The hills in the rear are clothed with timber without rendering service to any. Traces of former Towns and settlements were visible as we came along and where'er we turned, but all were either destroyed, taken captive or fled." (Rogers 1961, p. 340).

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APPENDIX I

LIST OF SITES PLOTTED ON FIG. 1.

Site No.	Grid ref.	Name	Character	Defences
N43/52	734 448	Orere School	Ridge pa	2 tranverse ditches and banks
N43/57	710 501	Waiti Bay	Headland pa	Transverse ditch and bank
N43/59	659 500	Pawhetau Point	Headland pa	3 tranverse ditches and banks
N43/64	686 502	Kawakawa Bay	Headland pa	2 tranverse ditches and scarps
N43/64A	686 500	Kawakawa Bay	Terraced site	—
N43/67	688 470	Kawakawa Bay Orere Road	Ridge pa	Transverse ditch and bank
N43/91	608 499	Pouto Point	Headland pa	2 tranverse ditches and banks
N43/91A	609 499	Pouto Point	Pit group	—
N43/92	603 492	Wairoa estuary	Ridge pa	1 tranverse and 1 lateral ditch and scarp
N43/93	601 490	Wairoa estuary	Ridge pa	2 tranverse ditches
N43/94	596 486	Wairoa estuary	Ridge pa	Short tranverse bank only
N43/95	595 484	Wairoa estuary	Terraced site with pits	—
N43/96	605 478	Kawakawa Bay Road	Pit group	—
N43/97	628 501	Kauri Bay	Headland pa	Transverse ditch and bank
N43/98	626 496	Kauri Bay	Ridge pa	Transverse ditch and bank
N43/99	651 516	Koherurahi Point	Headland pa	2 tranverse ditches
N43/100	739 480	Puatiti Bay	Ring ditch pa	Ditch and scarp
N43/101	734 443	Orere	Pit group	4 pits and platform
N43/102	734 439	Orere	Pit group	11 pits and 3 platforms

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